Irish theatre in the 21st century: traumatic histories, feminist interventions

Teatro irlandês no século 21: histórias traumáticas, intervenções feministas

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Abstract: In recent years, #MeToo became a point of identification for all women regarding their embodied experience in public space, specifically, articulating *collectively* that embodied female experience is very often subject to sexual harassment, violence and abuse. This movement demonstrated that, as a woman, it is more likely that you *will* suffer from sexual harassment, violence and abuse in your lifetime, than *not*. This is traumatic, it is extraordinary, and yet, this is the everyday reality for women. While #MeToo trended on social media globally in 2017, this identification and articulation of embodied female experience as regularly subject to abuse can be traced via scholarship and the arts centuries previous. What is most striking *today* is that there is mainstream public attention engaging with these narratives, where traditionally there was only silence, dismissal and denial. The identification of #MeToo is not new, but perhaps the mass public engagement with it is. In this essay, I will explore those historical contexts with regard to contemporary Irish theatre. Through analysis of two case studies, Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* (2000) co-produced by Druid and the Royal Court, and ANU Productions' *Laundry* (2011) directed by Louise Lowe, this essay will consider how contemporary Irish theatre engages with traumatic histories utilising a feminist consciousness.
Keywords: Irish theatre. Feminism. Trauma. Family. Performance

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Resumo: *Nos últimos anos, o movimento #MeToo tornou-se marca de identificação para todas as mulheres com relação à experiência de seus corpos no espaço público, especificamente expressando coletivamente que a experiência do corpo feminino está muito frequentemente sujeita ao assédio sexual, à violência e ao abuso. Esse movimento demonstrou que é mais provável que uma pessoa, sendo mulher, sofra assédio sexual, violência e abuso ao longo de sua vida do que não. Isso é traumático, extraordinário, e, ainda assim, é a realidade cotidiana das mulheres. Mesmo que o movimento #MeToo tenha se popularizado nas mídias sociais de forma global em 2017, a identificação e a expressão da experiência do corpo feminino como regularmente sujeito a abuso podem ser encontradas em trabalhos acadêmicos e nas artes de séculos atrás. O que mais impressiona hoje é a atenção que a opinião pública tem dado a essas narrativas, quando tradicionalmente havia apenas silêncio, isenção e negação. A marca #MeToo não é nova, mas talvez o envolvimento em massa do público seja. Neste artigo, pretendo explorar esses contextos históricos com relação ao teatro irlandês contemporâneo. Pela análise de dois casos, On Raftery's Hill (2000), de Marina Carr, coproduzida pela Druid Theatre Company e pelo Royal Court Theatre; e Laundry (2011), produzida pela ANU Productions e dirigida por Louise Lowe, este artigo discutirá como o teatro irlandês contemporâneo lida com histórias traumáticas utilizando uma consciência feminista.*

Palavras-chave: *Teatro irlandês. Feminismo. Trauma. Família. Performance.*

Introduction: #MeToo Then and Now

The #MeToo[2] movement was instigated online by Tarana Burke in 2006 to express solidarity and support for women of colour who had suffered sexual harassment and abuse, particularly in the workplace. By its global social media presence in 2017, its resonance and reference

2 See 'MeToo' website for further details: https://metoomvmt.org/about/#history. Accessed 1 October 2019.

expanded much further, though it is worth noting that women of colour may have been sidelined as a result of the media attention to famous white women. #MeToo became a point of identification for all women regarding their embodied experience in public space, specifically, articulating *collectively* that embodied female experience is very often subject to sexual harassment, violence and abuse. This movement demonstrated that, as a woman, it is more likely that you *will* suffer from sexual harassment, violence and abuse in your lifetime, then *not*. This is traumatic, it is extraordinary, and yet, this is the everyday reality for women. While #MeToo trended on social media globally in 2017, this identification and articulation of embodied female experience as regularly subject to abuse can be traced via scholarship and the arts centuries previous. What is most striking *today* is that there is mainstream public attention engaging with these narratives, where traditionally there was only silence, dismissal and denial. The identification of #MeToo is not new, but perhaps the mass public engagement with it is.

In this essay,[3] I will illuminate those historical contexts with regard to contemporary Irish theatre. Through analysis of two case studies – Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill*[4], which premiered as a co-production between the Tony award-winning Druid Theatre with London's Royal Court in 2000, touring Ireland, the UK, and the US, and ANU Productions' *Laundry*[5], directed by Louise Lowe, premiered as part of Dublin Theatre

3 This essay includes analysis first published in my monograph Staging Trauma: Bodies in Shadow. Palgrave, 2018.

4 Marina Carr, On Raftery's Hill in Marina Carr: Plays 2. (London: Faber, 2000), 35. On Raftery's Hill was first performed as a Druid Theatre Company/Royal Court Theatre co-production at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway on 9 May 2000, and subsequently at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, London, on 29 June 2000. Sorrel Raftery was played by Mary Murray, Ded Raftery by Michael Tierney, Dinah Raftery by Cara Kelly, Shalome Raftery by Valerie Lilley, Red Raftery by Tom Hickey, Isaac Dunn by Kieran Ahern and Dara Mood by Keith McErlean. The production was directed by Garry Hynes, designed by Tony Walton, lighting design by Richard Pilbrow, sound design by Rich Walsh and music composed by Paddy Cuneen.

5 ANU Productions, Laundry, directed by Louise Lowe at the site of the former Magdalene Laundry, Seán McDermott Street (formerly Gloucester St), Dublin, September 29-October 15 2011. Laundry was premiered as part of The Ulster Bank Dublin Theatre Festival 2011. Creative Producer Hannah Mullan, Designer Owen Boss, Lighting Design Sarah Jane Shiels, Sound Design Ivan Birsthistle and Vincent Doherty, Choreographer Emma O'Kane. Cast includes Úna Kavanagh, Sorcha Kenny, Catriona Lynch, Niamh McCann, Stephen

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Festival in 2011 – this essay will consider how contemporary theatre engages with traumatic histories utilising a feminist consciousness. Due to *Laundry*'s site-specific staging in Ireland's longest running Magdalene laundry building, this production could not tour, though its impact remains highly significant in Ireland and among the global diaspora, of whom many include Magdalene survivors and their families, since its production in 2011.

My research examines the staging contexts of these case studies, locating them among the traumatic histories they were drawn from, which centre on women saying, sometimes loudly, and sometimes quietly, #MeToo. However, they said this traditionally in isolated historical contexts, dominated by the overwhelming power of the Irish institutions of church, family, and nation, and without the immediate collective community that one can access online today. For the women depicted in these productions, there was little opportunity to challenge the normalised patterns of abuse they were subjected to as part of conservative ideologies regarding gender, the family, and religion that were inextricably linked to the strong relationship between church and state in twentieth-century Ireland.

Trauma, particularly women's trauma, constitutes an extraordinary everyday experience, and in contemporary Irish theatre as well as literature, film and various forms of cultural production, we are surrounded by female-led storytelling that engage with this in recent years. Theatre scholar Paige Reynolds notes this in her research on Eimer McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (2013). Reynolds (2014) summarises the connections between this seminal novel and its twentieth century legacies in 'modern and contemporary Irish literature: the rural poverty, the unhappy family, the sexual abuse, the oppressive Catholicism….[McBride] resurrects the

Murray, Bairbre Ní Caoimh, Peter O'Byrne, Robbie O'Connor, Niamh Shaw and Zara Starr. Community cast includes Martin Collins, Stephen Duigenan, Paddy Fitzpatrick, Tracey McCann, Laura Murray, Eric O'Brien, Fiona Shiel and Lauren White. Laundry won 'Best Production' at the Irish Times Theatre Awards 2012.

legacy of modernism to condemn childhood sexual abuse and does so in part by drawing attention to the complexity of that abuse for victims.' Furthermore, McBride's novel highlights how this type of abuse is widespread in her very title. Referring to her central protagonist as 'A Girl', rather than giving her a name, is telling of how this experience is representative of a large number of women.

In *Trauma and Recovery*, the work of leading US psychiatrist Judith Herman (1992) focuses on incest and abuse of women in the latter half of the twentieth century, a time when second wave feminism voiced many concerns regarding embodied female experience. Herman's research evidences that women in everyday life are as traumatised as male war veterans. The male space of trauma is war – it is public, and acknowledged, and legitimated. The female space of trauma is the home – it is private, it is silenced, and it is often denied. However, contemporary theatre in Ireland is staging these homes, and silences, and contemporary audiences are listening. Herman's research is essential to this essay, examined in greater detail in the forthcoming analysis.

How do we recognise trauma in performance? Usually not with women screaming on stage, or bombs going off. Usually not with linear monologues that provide a beginning, middle, and end, and follow tradition concepts of logic and rationale that gained traction as part of western imperialism. Trauma is messy, confused, contradictory, and sometimes hidden, submerged in shame and denial. Aesthetically and dramaturgically, trauma in performance can manifest in narrative, design, embodiment, gesture, pattern and symptom, and often in sporadic, non-linear and inconclusive ways, as is customary with postmodern performance. Jean-François Lyotard (1190, p. 47) observes: 'What art can do is bear witness not to the sublime, but to this aporia of art and to its pain. It does not say the unsayable, but says that it cannot say it.' Suzanne Little draws from much of the critical work across the humanities and social sciences in her astute

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article 'Repeating Repetition' to identify the range of potential registers one may expect from an encounter with trauma or shock. Little (2015, p. 45) summarises acute conditions such as 'wordless and affectless states; loss of the ability to comprehend or use syntax; distortions of vision, taste, sound and touch and hallucinations.' The performance space that stages trauma must host these states of traumatic play, constantly navigating the disruptions that emerge as theatre artists draw upon both their imaginative resources as well as what David Dean, Yana Meerzon and Kathryn Prince note in *History, Memory, Performance* (2015, p. 2): 'the archives and repertoires of memory, a notion understood on the one hand in its collective, national, and public contexts and the other as something acutely personal, subjective, individual, even idiosyncratic and unreliable.'

First and foremost, though, my study must address this question to proceed: What is trauma? There are many avenues to theorise this. I choose to begin with Herman's outline of the traumatic as her research closely follows traumatic experiences of women and is thus fitting to open my enquiries:

> Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe (HERMAN, 1992, p. 33).

These case studies stage the trauma of violation, containment, loss and exile - and the trauma of social conditions that suppress the significance and prevalence of those experiences. The trauma becomes extended to include *the lack of intervention* that legitimates the initial traumatic encounter, thus spawning a wider web of secondary traumas. Often, we

can only recognise trauma after it happens, as with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Definitions of what constitutes PTSD remain in debate since it became formally established in the 1980s, but trauma theorist Roger Luckhurst provides a useful general outline:

> Individuals who experience wars, disasters, accidents or other extreme 'stressor' events seem to produce certain identifiable somatic and psycho-somatic disturbances. Aside from myriad physical symptoms, trauma disrupts memory, and therefore identity, in peculiar ways (LUCKHURST, 2008, p. 1).

In these forthcoming case studies, we are offered glimpses of the 'stressor' events these female characters experienced, directly resonant of what women experience in both contemporary and historical Irish society.

Case Studies 1: *On Raftery's Hill*

Contemporary Irish playwright Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* is arguably one of the most traumatic plays that premiered in Ireland, the UK and US in 2000. Yet within such significant traumatic dramatic activity and scope for staging, what is the central trauma among the multiple traumas enacted and signaled? One's initial instinct is likely to respond by furiously pointing to the rape scene which concludes Act I, written to be performed centre stage followed by a blackout and thus lights up on the audience for the interval. Surely, the father's rape of his virginal daughter is the central trauma of the play? Surely, the naturalistic staging of the rape on the kitchen table (stabbing the kitchen table with a knife to signal penetration) was the most traumatic theatrical staging? Violence, torture, incest, abuse, humiliation, and despair: the list of actions and emotions that can exist under the umbrella terms of 'violation' and 'trauma' can go on. In this case, as is generally the case, the trauma is both physical and psychological.

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While the traumatic act of rape is committed by a single perpetrator in this scene, the crime is protected by the complicit silence staged in the dramatic world, which could be argued as significantly traumatic as the act of violation, though this analysis does intend to provide any crude hierarchy of suffering. This violation alongside the general familial and cultural complicity speaks to the histories of patriarchal social structures that continue to normalise and safeguard domestic abuse, clearly resonant with contemporary society. For the audiences attending this play, this drama offers easy recognition of the contemporary time and space, through stylized gestures of dialogue, embodiment, design and interaction. The community depicted on stage is the one 'we'[6] can relate to, and, the one 'we' continue to build. History does not provide a buffer nor protection. The only technique Carr utilises to convey some potential psychological distance between the realist social forces underpinning the narrative and its contextual cultural parameters is the questioning of the evolution of humans from animals, and the potential heredity consequences of this evolution.

Carr (2000) dramatises the violent act of rape and histories of incest as deeply embedded practices in Irish culture, and not as something that occurs as an isolated incident, provoking public outrage or the force of the law. The virginal body of youngest daughter Sorrel Raftery is spread-eagled on the kitchen table centre stage and violated by her father in his drunken rage, abuse he has enacted previously with his eldest daughter Dinah. All family members know of the abuse and do not intervene. There are also suggestions of sexual abuse occurring in previous generations of the family and throughout the wider community in the play. By the play's end, the cycle of repetition within the dramatic reality is confirmed, and thus, no hope or potential for change is offered by the play. The premiere

6 By 'we' I mean the audiences in Ireland, the UK and the US. I consider them a group by the performance location as western, first world, English-speaking, and thus largely resonant with the location of the action in the play – western, first world, English-speaking, through specific to rural Ireland.

production of this play toured to established city centre venues in Ireland, the UK and US. It was staged in venues where targeted marketing is directed at mainstream popular audiences, and the ramifications of this tour leads to a wealth of debate for this study. In my extended study, the analysis not only considers the staging of trauma in this play, but the political staging of theatrical institutions and programming in contemporary neoliberal contexts, and the performativity of Irishness in national and global contexts.

As Herman (1992) reveals, this violation results in a physical and sexual attack, but also, a moral and psychological attack. She has been terrorised, dominated and humiliated by her father. The basic sense of identity, developed since birth through notions of self, family, and society, are ridiculed and destabilised through this violation. It extends further than the act of rape to the act of complicity engaged in by her family and community. Such examples of family, friends and community refusing to acknowledge victims' experiences of rape and sexual assault are widely reported, and indeed, Herman historicises the attitudes and laws which support these conditions of denial and repression. As she declares, 'There is no public monument for rape survivors' (HERMAN, 1992, p. 73). Sorrel is also violated and traumatised by her biological mother and half-sister, Dinah, and grandmother/great-grandmother Shalome, whose brief comment '…poor little Sorrel. I wanted to stop it. Is she still alive?' (CARR, 2000, p. 48) tells the audience that whether upstairs or downstairs, doors closed or open, the Raftery family members heard and understood Red was attacking Sorrel but did not intervene during the act or come to her aid post-attack. This abandonment of Sorrel by the Raftery family members tells that they conceive of the rape as an inevitable initiation into a cycle of abuse, violence and secrecy that has become normalised through their history (and social history), and is safeguarded as well as reproduced by those it has violated.

In this play, public shame is conceived of as of greater consequence

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than personal trauma by society's structures. Dinah knew that one day Red may rape Sorrel, 'the only perfect thing in this house' (CARR, 2000, p. 45). She did not remove Sorrel from the Raftery house on the hill to live in a more secure environment or home elsewhere. She did not warn Sorrel about the realities of Red's desires and attacks. If she was listening to the attack behind the door, as Sorrel accuses her of, she did not intervene. She did not remove Sorrel from the house post-rape or reassure Sorrel that she had been grossly wronged and deserved care and restitution. Rather, Carr sets up a reaction that according to Herman's research is most common for female victims to experience post-rape. She isolates her further, shames her, and blames her.

According to Herman (1992), such abandonment furthers the traumatic impact on the victim, and lessens their ability to recover their sense of self and identity through the re-establishment of trust and safety. Throughout *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman (1992, p. 3) analyses 'commonalities'. This refers to experiences of trauma that, while distinctive in their manifestation and context, maintain many parallel dynamics of operation (i.e., the captivity of battered women and the captivity of political prisoners), as well as post-traumatic symptoms. In particular, the PTSD of combat soldiers and those who conduct military operations interconnects with those of female experiences of sexual and domestic abuse. This has led to comparative studies of the male space of public trauma (war) with the female space of private trauma (domestic and sexual abuse). However, how such victims are treated and judged by immediate peers and wider society drastically alters. Herman's research tells that generally, in the experience of returned soldiers or victims of civilian disasters or ordinary crimes, '[…] the victim's immediate family and friends usually mobilize to provide refuge and safety' (HERMAN, 1992, p. 62). While Herman is quick to note that combat survivors often describe that no one in the community or society *really* wants to know the details of war, at the same

time, *public* memorials are erected, *public* holidays are announced, and *public* speeches are made. In recent decades, compensation demands for PTSD can be sought and won. These actions imbue the experience of war with public respect, legitimizing the experience of trauma as publically, and nationally, significant, though the sacrifice of any human life in war cannot ever be justified or compensated. However, with female victims of sexual abuse, Herman's research details that the people closest to the victim will not necessarily rally to her aid. Indeed, many of the community may be more supportive to the alleged rapist or abuser than to the female victim. To maintain a distance from the attacker, the victim may need to retreat from some part or all of her social network (HERMAN, 1992, p. 62). Furthermore, had it not been for the legitimacy associated with veteran trauma, the parallels with female trauma from abuse may not have been identified, and thus, somewhat reluctantly validated by association. On this, Herman concludes:

> Only after 1980, when the efforts of combat veterans had legitimated the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder, did it become clear that the psychological syndrome seen in survivors of rape, domestic battery, and incest was essentially the same as the syndrome seen in survivors of war. The implications of this insight are as horrifying in the present as they were a century ago: the subordinate condition of women is maintained and enforced by the hidden violence of men. There is war between the sexes. Rape victims, battered women, and sexually abused children are the casualties. (HERMAN, 1992, p. 32).

Herman's overall claim is that for the formal (i.e., funded) study of psychological trauma to occur, which would lead to a mass social engagement with trauma in various forms, the concurrent political elite must first have a strategic vested need to legitimate the traumatic experience. Until that strategic need is identified and studies advanced, public attitudes are not conditioned or enabled to support it. Herman's monograph begins

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with an interrogation of historical events in the late nineteenth century in Europe primarily led by Freud, Janet, Charcot and the Salpêtriére in Paris, and leads to late twentieth century in the US, charting how political movements come to find themselves in a situation where they need to support the psychological study of trauma and thereby public engagement with trauma. I cannot go further on that within the scope of this essay,[7] but it remains important to note that there is significant research conducted on this topic.

Laundry

In *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth (1996, p. 26) asks 'What do the dying and bodies of the past [...] have to do with the living bodies of the present? And what is the role of *our seeing* in establishing a relation between these two sets of bodies?' To respond to Caruth's question, this study of ANU Production's *Laundry* demonstrates that the dying and bodies of the past are implicit in the social and political fabric of the present. Indeed, they are also implicated in the fabric for potential futures. Yet the potential of their present-day impact is dependent on dominant prevailing and historical value-systems and power economies. These structures largely determine one's agency to communicate and construct narratives, personal and public, and access channels of official and cultural discourse. That is not to suggest that hidden bodies bear no impact on present-day life and the potential for change, or, that very visible bodies necessarily hold a position of power. Indeed, as this chapter will reveal, the invisibility and silence of centuries of deceased Magdalenes and the remaining survivors potently illuminate the complex tapestry of power economies and hierarchies both in Ireland and the Christian countries throughout Europe, America, and Australia which established and maintained the laundries and related

7 I expand much further on this history in the Introduction to *Staging Trauma,* pp. 1-39.

institutions. Only by claiming witness to their shadows and how their illegal and inhumane incarceration became normalised, can one begin to comprehend the privileges and discriminations fundamental to processes of seeing and not-seeing, speaking and being silenced.

ANU are recognised as Ireland's leading theatre company that stages immersive experience, challenging the very history and concept of what theatre is and can be. Their works awakens audience agency. One does not forget their experience at an ANU production. I cannot forget *Laundry*.[8] As an audience member, you are guided throughout the building to observe different scenes of everyday activity for Magdalenes and invited to participate, though not forced to. I will never forget the power of those high walls and locked doors. I will never forget the silence and the smell. It confronted me, through embodiment more so than language, with my history as an Irish woman in a way that I had only been half-conscious of previously. *Laundry* visibly and viscerally merged the bodies of the past with the bodies of the present in performance. This merger provoked conflicting memories and histories, urgent queries regarding the implementation of constitutional law, and renewed scrutiny of wider social value systems. Tense questions regarding the role and responsibilities of individual Irish citizens as well as collective communities in relation to marginalised institutional histories re-emerged and circulated nationally and internationally. *Laundry* staged some of the bodies that Irish institutions had worked hard to hide. Many of the women the production referenced lie in unmarked graves, their lives and deaths rarely witnessed or documented.

This site-specific performance speaks to the histories of specific Magdalene penitents institutionalised in Dublin's city centre Gloucester Street laundry throughout the twentieth century, providing a harrowing encounter with religious-led state-sanctioned violence targeting female

8 My research on Laundry was first published in Modern Drama, 'From Laundries to Labour Camps: Staging Ireland's 'Rule of Silence' in Anu Productions Laundry', (2014), 57: 1, pp. 65-93.

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autonomy largely via staging strategies of silence and observation. In this production, the audience's gaze is returned and their bodies interact with the surroundings of those once incarcerated there. The contemporary political context informing this performance, and, how this performance continues to inform contemporary politics in Ireland as well as globally, requires digging up, literally and metaphorically, history's victims, or as Milija Gluhovic (2013, p. 1) refers to 'the simultaneous difficulty and necessity of confronting bodies from the past.' In recent decades, societies in Ireland and the north of Ireland, face 'discoveries' of historical abuse and human remains related to the activities of Ireland's reliance on institutionalisation throughout the twentieth-century, a history that is fundamentally connected to poverty and poscolonialism. As the respectability and power of these religious-led institutions collapsed in recent years, the public sphere is dominated with the emerging traumas of those who suffered as a result of the ideologies informing the time, and struggling to enact accountability and redress.

In Ireland, Gluhovic's 'bodies from the past' include institutionalised bodies, such as those who were considered as disruptive to the historical narrative of symbolic Mother Ireland and ancient Celtic Irish heritage, the popular narrative of Irish history. *Laundry* questions the totality of this historical narrative, showcasing how Irish women and mothers were treated following the birth of symbolic Mother Ireland. It was marriage or precarity. If they did not enter [heterosexual] marriage, and if their husbands/fathers/brothers could not support their presence *in* the family home, they could be 'sent *to* the home', a colloquial expression that refers to institutionalisation. Ireland's population in the twentieth century is the most institutionalised in the world, with one per cent of citizens being sent to Magdalene laundries, Mother and Baby Homes, orphanages, workhouses and psychiatric asylums (O'SULLIVAN e O'DONNELL, 2012, p. 9). These are not all women, but many of these

institutions operated as a result of state and church control of women's bodies, lives, legal rights and stringently monitored application of ideals of motherhood.[9] The remaining legacy of the everyday reality for women, and indeed children, is outlined in the most recent Women's Aid report. The most dangerous place for women and children in contemporary times is within their homes (and not on the streets in the middle of the night) in case of attack from a person who is known to them.[10]

Laundry signalled the stakes at play for the Irish state, its citizens and its 'official' history. On 5 February 2013, the 'Report of the InterDepartmental Committee to establish the facts of state involvement with the Magdalene Laundries' chaired by former Senator Martin McAleese (hereafter referred to as the 'McAleese report') was published, eighteen months after it began its inquiry. (Senator McAleese announced his retirement on 1 February, four days before the report was published.) This inquiry into state involvement commenced following an urgent recommendation from the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UNCAT) in 201111 though the Irish state had previously argued that women entered these institutions voluntarily and were managed by the religious orders without state involvement. This report acknowledges significant state involvement from 1922 – when the Irish Free State was established as a dominion of the British Empire under the Anglo-Irish Treaty –, with 26.5% of referrals made by state authorities.[12] Yet, *An Taoiseach* (the Prime

9 See Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylum in Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004); James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries: And the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2008).

10 Women's Aid most recent media release finds that 'Women more likely to be killed at home and by an ex-partner, according to new Women's Aid Femicide Report,' 25 November 2016. See: https://www.womensaid.ie/about/newsevents/news/2016/11/25/media-release-women-more-likely-to-be-killed-at-ho/. Accessed 25 November 2016.

11 The survivor advocacy group Justice for Magdalenes updates its website with their press releases, government responses and media coverage of this campaign. Further information can be found at http://www.magdalenelaundries.com

12 The full report can be accessed and downloaded from The Department of Justice and Equality website. <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/MagdalenRpt2013 >

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Minister) of the time, Enda Kenny, failed to apologise in full on behalf of the Irish state to the remaining survivors and the families of its victims[13] on its publication. Instead, the apology came weeks later as intense international public pressure mounted.) Following the McAleese report, two nuns, remaining anonymous, gave a radio interview broadcast on Radio Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), the national broadcaster. They defended the Church's role in Magdalene history, refusing to apologise[14] and reminding listeners that it was the families who put them there, and during those times, Ireland was a 'no welfare state'. Since then, the four Orders who ran the laundries in the Republic of Ireland have refused to contribute to the Redress Scheme set up by the Irish government in the wake of the Report (this scheme was confirmed after much delay and initial hesitancy to do so).[15] Nigel Rodley, Chairman of the UN Human Rights Committee, commented on the Irish State's human rights records, highlighting the ritualised strategy of official response to these scandals and silenced histories, especially when they do not further any aspect of the state's dominant neoliberal agenda. Rodley declared:

> That it is time the Irish State stopped its automatic response to every scandal being first to deny, then

13 Stephen Collins and Harry McGee, 'Kenny criticised for failure to issue Magdalene apology', *Irish Times*, 6 February 2013. http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/breaking/2013/0206/breaking5.html Accessed 6 February 2013.

14 In the interview conducted by Claire McCormack broadcast on RTÉ's Radio 1's 'The God Slot' on 10pm, 8 March 2013, two nuns reacted to the allegations regarding suffering and abuse in the Magdalene laundries at the hands of the various Orders who managed them, on condition that the nuns, their congregations, and where they worked were not named. The voices heard belong to performers. Patsy McGarry reports in 'Magdalene Nuns Hit Back at Critics and Defend their Role' in *The Irish Times*, 'When asked whether an apology might be appropriate after the McAleese report on the laundries, "Sister A" responded, apologise for what?" […] "There was a terrible need for a lot of those women because they were on the street with no social welfare and starving. We provided shelters for them. It was the 'no welfare' state and we are looking with today's eyes at a totally different era.' http://www.irishtimes.com/news/magdalene-nuns-hit-back-at-critics-and-defend-their-role-1.1319508 Accessed 6 August 2013.

15 Harry McGee reports in 'Nuns Say They Will Not Pay Magdalene Compensation' that 'The Mercy Sisters, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, the Sisters of Charity and the Good Shepherd Sisters have informed Minister for Justice Alan Shatter in recent days that they will not pay into the fund, which could cost up to €58 million.' *The Irish Times*, 16 July 2013. http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/nuns-say-they-will-not-pay-magdalene-compensation-1.1464737 Accessed 6 August 2013.

> delay, then lie, cover up and eventually, if forced, throw some money at it and hope it will go away. In all this, it takes the sides of the elites, those who wield more power than is healthy, whose concerns are for protecting their members including the medical profession (RODLEY, 2014).

Laundry, in this context, operates as a case study of how performance can disrupt and challenge official narratives and histories promoted by leading forces of authority, offering sidelined and suppressed narratives a space in the public domain, limiting as that space may be. This study does not argue that victims, artists or individuals seek to use the arts directly as a method of drawing public attention to wrongdoing, but acknowledges that in modern and contemporary Ireland, the arts often directly and significantly contribute to the creation of cultural, phenomenological, and psychological spaces which encounter narratives not yet officially welcomed in the public sphere.

Freud turns to literature to investigate this complex relationship between 'knowing and not knowing', a key dialectic of trauma studies throughout its interdisciplinarity. In *The Trauma Question*, Luckhurst (2008, p. 6) affirms it seems to 'foreground the slippages inherent in the act of representation.' In this case study, this tension of 'knowing and not knowing' demands analysis of the overlapping acts of presence, visibility, embodiment and interaction. Throughout *Laundry*, the performance aesthetics, installations and encounters staged at the site of performance presented 'knowing' side by side with the crimes against humanity a state declared that it did 'not know'. Caruth's reading of the genealogy of trauma studies foregrounds the phenomena of '*latency*, the period in which the effects of the experiences are not apparent' (CARUTH, 1996, p. 17), also commonly referred to as '*nachträglich*' further detailed by Luckhurst (2008, p. 81). I argue that in this case, the effects of Magdalene

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history have always been apparent, visible and affective in Irish laws and cultural traditions which govern public and private behaviours, particularly in relation to hegemonic control of the body, sexuality and sex. Latency however, is a useful term for considering the effects of the experience in relation to the *acknowledgement* of wrongdoing and the processes of accountability. In a postcolonial society such as Ireland, the established twentieth-century tradition of navigating accountability for historical trauma is examining the British Empire's colonial impact. There is not yet an equal tradition in the contemporary moment within Ireland for accepting accountability of state-led wrongdoing, and social complicity, or any top-down desire to create a dialogue regarding acknowledgement and accountability of state-led crimes.

Conclusion: Traumatic Legacies

Luckhurst (2008, p. 4-5), like Caruth and other seminal trauma theorists, draw from Freudian analysis to query latency, exploring 'the strange temporality of traumatic memory: an event can only be understood as traumatic *after* the fact, through the symptoms and flashbacks and the delayed attempts at understanding that these signs of disturbance produce'. While steps have been made to recover these histories, and to examine these plays in a new light, culturally, there remains a hesitancy and unease regarding the investigation of the treatment of vulnerable women in Ireland. This is partly a legacy of the treatment of the female body as a result of constitutional articles which remain in effect throughout the 1937 Constitution, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*. This ensures a legal framework and public validation for the control of women, inevitably creating the conditions for the violence enacted against them, as well as normalised everyday patterns of misogyny. Thus, equality is more clearly demonstrated in theory than in practice.

The cases studies driving this research each displays registers of contemporary neoliberal politics and culture, which tend to impact not only a culture of individualisation but one of isolation, further disempowering a subject already vulnerable. *Laundry* provides a historical lens from which to observe the relationship between the politics of economics and citizens deems unprofitable, or not useful, essentially 'docile' in Foucauldian terms. *On Raftery's Hill* interrogates the personal dangers associated with stringently monitored tropes of cultural myth, and Carr dramatises the unforgiving consequences for those who threaten the ongoing stability of established cultural identity, at any cost.

Both these case studies are about Ireland, history, and trauma. They utilise the potency of Irish land and landscape to comment on the failures of hereditary familial structures, patriarchal politics and western economies. Both are led by female theatre artists and depict experiences of vulnerability, wrongdoing and sidelined subjects. While they differ enormously in theme and form, one can perhaps conclude that what motivates these theatre artists then, on some level, is acknowledging trauma that is traditionally suppressed, denied, or marginalised in public space. In that, they take a risk with reception, a key focus of this wider study. By drawing attention to the stories of the vulnerable or dispossessed, they inevitably signal the failure of social mechanisms and, indeed, the failure of society to intervene at times. Such productions inherently demand reaction and responsibility, necessitating a debate on *relationality* in contemporary society. That debate is what #MeToo provoked on a global scale, framed by female-led discourse regarding embodied female experience. Unfortunately, the key point of commonality amongst these women all over the world was violence. Fortunately, the key reason that #MeToo harnessed such global momentum is that many people are listening.

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